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ABSTRACT

This report emphasizes the techniques required today for effective slide construction and contains suggestions about the nuts and bolts of slide preparation. Two instructors developed a presentation at Utah Valley State College to enhance their teaching of the sonnet and the Japanese haiku. Their premise: since poetry is a highly visual art form, particularly, the English sonnet and the Japanese Haiku, then an intense visual presentation might go a long way toward doing them justice. Their presentation involved computer-stored slides and other graphics. The program used was Presentation 2.0. Technical equipment was minimal: they needed only a good LCD projector, a high intensity overhead projector, and a 386 or better laptop computer with Presentation 2.0 installed. It should be remembered that a slide show is more than a simple transfer of information via a parade of colorful slides with effective text and appropriate graphics. Elements of art and music, as well as reader participation, can and should be incorporated. A few hints about the technical end of things would include the following: (1) save, save, save files; (2) use a high-powered computer for faster creation; (3) keep extensive notes on elements within a slide; (4) a program of about 10 slides is best; (5) a preoccupation with an uninterrupted flow of technology is usually the mark of an inexperienced presenter; and (6) when working with scanned color photographs, it is important to keep the amount of memory required as low as possible. The actual show was produced in three interlinked segments, involving slides, graphics and music. The combination of several technical and creative features made this presentation a success. One instructor's artistic talent, her knowledge of psychological and visual factors in presentation art, the musical syncopation of varieties of sound clips, the variety of ways in which one slide can be superimposed on another--all made the presentation a success and a pleasure to give. (TB)

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Sonnets, High Tech, Haiku: Teaching Poetry in the CAI Classroom

Although, in the absence of my partner, I am providing the text for this article, the presentation discussed was equally the work of both of us, to the extent that it should be considered jointly authored. In May of 1994, Professor Cynthia Krebs and I presented at the NISOD 16th Annual International Conference on Teaching Excellence, a set of three "slide shows", or large-screen full color text and graphic projections, created with the Presentations 2.0 technology, at that time state-of-the-art. Since Utah Valley State College is well known for its "high-tech" orientation, we hoped our college could make a significant contribution using such tools. It was particularly fortunate for me that Ms. Krebs is a knowledgeable and accomplished creator of presentation programs, a field she has worked in for many years. During our work together, I gained many an insight into the psychology and artistry of this teaching form from her clever suggestions and current knowledge. Since few presentations today emphasize the techniques required for effective slide construction, the brief narrative of this report will contain many "excursions" and perhaps a few "alarums", to quote Twain, about the nuts and bolts of slide preparation.

A word of explanation is in order. On our campus at that time, as today, the 2.0 Presentation software, now updated to 3.0 Presentations, happened to be highly popular. Many faculty had

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taken classes to master it, and the program was licensed to UVSC. As a result a variety of ideas and programs suitable to 2.0 exclusively were and are swapped and circulated. However, many other good programs exist, each with its particular strength. Although 2.0 Presentations had then (and to my knowledge may still have) the only editing capability for individual scanned-in graphics, as well as a fine variety of color gradation devices and text-manipulating techniques, these were the only unique superiorities I was aware of in that software. For example, in the enlarged peacock "feather-eye" which concluded one slow, I was able to enhance color pixel by pixel for a brilliant blue-green effect. A reader should remember that I am not at all familiar with the full market range of presentation software.

I. Rationale

Our premise was simple. Since poetry is a highly visual art form, and since the forms we chose, the English sonnet and the Japanese haiku, are particularly visual, then an intense visual presentation might go a long way toward doing them justice.

In the case of each form, a difficulty in approaching the student is the minute focusing and dividing of attention upon such details as metric form, or figures of speech, without allowing the student to lose the "distance perspective" required to understand broad thematic concepts. For these purposes, we found, presentations are ideal. They also allowed creativity in that students could make and view quickly choices as to color

background, font type, size and location of graphics.

II. Technical Equipment

Technical equipment was minimal. Along with prepared disks (and back-up copies) we only needed a good LCD projector, a high-intensity overhead projector, and a 386 or better laptop computer with, of course, the 2.0 Presentations program installed. It is better for purposes of speed and convenience to have the program transferred to the computer's C-drive before beginning the show. The 2.0 program has an attachment to each slide which can store notes. We had the option of distributing notes, but, wishing to maintain visual impact for our essentially simple principles, we did not use this feature. Since this program, several leading companies have begun marketing a desktop projector which is more effective than the LCD panel for a travelling program like ours, and very light weight. It works quite well. An airmouse might also have been useful, but presenters should avoid the laser-light pointers, whose impulses can, I believe, scramble signals within the presentation program. Special pointing is best done with the travelling arrow which the Presentations 2.0 program incorporates.

Preparing the disks themselves only required a 2.0 Presentations software program on a computer equipped with sound byte capabilities, and the use of a scanner to copy color pictures and prepare them for inclusion into the presentation.

Although the technology is relatively simple to handle,

Professor Krebs and I found it was useful to work in a team, so that one could operate programs while the other walked around the room conducting discussion. In this method, an interested participant can feel more comfortable asking the "tekkie" for a suggested change, without distracting the speaker.

Thus, required equipment included only: a 386 or better computer, either a single laptop alone or assistance from a traditional computer used for creation of the programs; a LCD panel and high-quality overhead projector (now replaceable with a desktop projector). An airmouse is optional. Wisdom dictates spare copies of the programs and overhead projector light bulbs.

III. Creating the Presentation

In a slide show a number of participants sit in a darkened room with a high degree of attention focused on a brilliantly-lit rectangle which can contain--almost anything. Gripping war photos. Elaborate diagrams, statistical charts. Four-foot tarantulas. A lovely woman floating in the clouds. The ruined face of Ophelia. Serious users of this technology must not forget its limitless potential. A slide show program, ideally, is more than a simple transfer of information via a parade of colorful slides with effective text and appropriate graphics. Elements of art and music, as well as reader participation, can and should be incorporated. Emotions and appeals should be generated. One of the goals of this program was to suggest a wider range of ideal effects than is commonly accepted. Although

any given program may take considerable time to craft, over time, well crafted programs will repay the original effort through re-use, and may even be linked to each other with text accompaniment.

In addition, creating a narrative program for teachers which allows the academic viewer at the same time to see the presentation through the teacher's and student's eyes, makes for a challenge. It is good to author such an effort in tandem, so that one author can play "viewer" to the other's "presenter". Such annoyances as illegible fonts, over-glitzy or over-busy effects, and three-foot-tall spelling errors can usually be spotted by a partner.

Here Professor Krebs' long-term expertise about slide shows was especially helpful. She provided color guides, tips on musical segments, experience with fonts, sizes of pictorial elements, artistic focus.

IV. Creating the Slide Shows

Those who have taken courses in presentations may not find this section helpful, but most presentations packages today are so easily mastered, technically, with the aid of a manual, that probably most users of the technology have had little formal education about its potential. And even an old hand can sometimes use diamonds only to engrave dog collars. I have assembled a list of tips which both authors found useful.

1. Save, save, save. This word cannot be too frequently

repeated. Since Presentations 2.0, like many another program, offers thousands and thousands of options, a user will sometimes stumble into a situation in which two effects cannot simultaneously occur. For example, when transparent color effects are used, many other Presentations features cannot also function. Thus, it is wise to "save" at least after creation of each individual slide, and often several times within the slide, if the author is exploring many possibilities. Until the slides are incorporated into a single program called a "quick file", a step coming at the end, they are nearly as fragile as an elaborate mosaic of tiles not yet glued down. Saving after each main change will ensure that work already done will not be lost, even though the program must be re-booted.

2. Use a high powered computer for faster slide creation. A slide consists of thousands of elements. The program must store all of these when a change is made to any, and a computer with 386 or preferably 486 K will move very much faster.

3. Keep extensive notes on elements within a slide. Note the fonts used, in exact terminology. (The font list will include this information.) Say, "I used the fourth purple on the third row for the top of the

gradation, and the second purple on that row for the bottom. I used Helvetica Bold TT Italic in 36 point size, and removed the outline. The shadow was pure white, at 30 degrees in both horizontal and vertical." Though tedious to write, it can save a partner hours of experimentation to duplicate your effect. Pity the partner who must go on such instructions as, "one of the Helveticas in something between twenty and forty, with a couple of purples in gradations and a white shadow." This is a recipe for five or six hours of sheer misery. If a single letter or font item is used as a graphic--and many "wingding" elements are intended for this--record which letter and font was used. Record also colors, gradations, outlines, shadows--all the support that goes into creating font graphics.

Notes are necessary because someone wishing to reproduce the work on a slightly different program may have to approximate with variations, the original. In ordinary classroom situations this may not be particularly important, but for special showings, it can be vital. Not all 2.0 Presentations programs are identical. Some contain more graphics or fonts than others, and additions to the stock can be purchased separately. For this reason, it is also a good idea to

use a more common font for the bulk of text. Chances are, it is much more readable anyway. Slide notes can be inserted on the notes section of the slide, an optional feature of unlimited space capacity.

4. A program of about ten slides is best. Any program being presented by a computer, unless using only the simplest and most basic "canned" formats and fonts, will be very high k-intensive. It takes up an enormous memory in the machine using it. It is better, generally, to have three programs of ten slides each than a thirty-slide program, and to expect a question-answer period or some other activity between programs. Audiences are quite patient, and will be happy to use time between programs to chat or catch up on note taking.

5. As an aside, it is worth noting that an anxious preoccupation with uninterrupted flow of technology is usually the mark of an inexperienced presenter. The more experienced have learned to continue gracefully or at least cheerfully lecturing while, for example, crawling around on the floor seeking elusive electric plugs, or rattling through drawers in search of the one spare projector bulb. Some students enjoy the distraction. Time-conscious presenters may want to

assemble a list of mini-activities for moments like these. Such activities can appear on the last slide of the show.

6. When working with scanned color photographs, it is important to keep the amount of memory required as low as possible. These pictures can take so much memory that an entire disk is required to store even one. It is best, generally, to stick to "color photo" or even one of the black and white versions, and to avoid the more intensive "millions of colors" setting on many programs. Most programs will inform the user how much "k" the picture will require, so that any picture can be viewed in various forms before making a choice. The actual scanning procedure is very easy.

V. Giving the Presentation

The show was produced in three interlinked segments.

Segment 1

The purpose of the presentation, to prove that slide shows could present with dramatic visual effects the texture of poetry, was illustrated in a slide show on the haiku. Here the musical segments chosen gave an oriental feeling, and in the case of the poem on rain puddles, a raindrop impression as well.

The show opened with a slide briefly describing the haiku's purpose, and a second listing its dominant characteristics.

Sections from an abstract magazine illustration, and enlarged stylized flying geese--part of a font selection featuring common highway markers--acted as illustrations. The font was a stark variety of Universal, which contained no serifs.

Three haikus illustrated the basic principles. Matsuo Basho's classic poem comparing lightning to the sudden night cry of cranes was illustrated by a scanned photograph of mating cranes, altered by scanner technology to produce a vivid orange-and-black silhouette. This was highlighted with lightning drawn onto the graphic by the 2.0 Presentation line drawing tool. I stressed the similarity of the sharp sounds in the poem, the sharp cries of the crane, and the jaggedness of the lightning and the silhouettes. Next I used two ordinary poems of my own, the first describing the colors machine oil leaves on rain puddles in parking lots as "phantom peacocks." Here I divided the poem into two slides, so that the last line would receive more impact. The first two lines, "Rain stops / and in the oil-slick puddles they collect," were printed again in the sans serif type, and illustrated against a black background by casually concentric ovals, dotted lines indicating rain, and a crescent of a peacock-feather "eye", with the center blacked out by a further black oval. The following slide consisted of a huge peacock feather-eye alone, enhanced for brilliance in blues and greens, and containing the single last line, "the phantom peacocks." Finally, in the creative segment of the show when the audience was invited to participate, a second middling poem of mine, which

I will describe later, occurred. The presentation team judged that two poems were sufficient to illustrate the meaning and impact of the haiku, particularly since our discussion was designed to meander somewhat between the lesson plan presented to the student and the consideration of technical and pedagogical approaches.

Segment 2

We then moved to a second program, crafted almost exclusively by Professor Krebs, on creativity with presentations. Since all three programs had been loaded in advance onto the C-drive of our computer, the switching time required was minimal. This space, however, furnished an excellent question-and-answer period for technical points on graphics. She introduced this segment with an instructional program which covers "do's" and "don'ts" in a vivid, graphic manner, and spoke at some length on color as an emotional pace-setter.

Returning to the haiku motif, Professor Krebs illustrated the difference design makes by taking my second haiku, which was intended to present to the reader the picture of a crescent moon leaving reflections shaped like hill on shallow, flowing water, water with a sandy bottom "cobbled" into crescent-marked sand patterned by changing currents. Beside the stream, the reader was to picture a set of bare footprints--the speaker's. The poem reads, "The moon / leaves heel marks on the sandy bottom. / I walk the other way."

Professor Krebs illustrated this in widely varying ways.

The first was a subdued monochrome in an oriental mood, in which the black silhouette of a peaceful crane rises out of shallow water before a bed of cattails. A green-black light played over the bird and plants, only bright enough to depict outlines clearly. The print, in oriental motif, was a light gray-green. The mood was plaintive and lonely, emphasizing a theme of lasting isolation. In the next slide she changed to a jaunty mood, showing little more than a sandy beach of graduated browns and pale golds. The print became jaunty and more brilliant, a carefree scrawl of handwriting. The only graphic was a set of bare footprints meandering nonchalantly across the sand a slim color bar graphic used for design emphasis. This was her favorite. "I did it my way," she called it.

The purpose of this segment, however, was to include the audience by asking for its favorite, and a final picture won their vote. Here a stylized beach scene, showing plenty of calm azure water, with azure shades predominating throughout a graphic of elegant curves, furnished the entire backdrop. It was a graphic the 2.0 program includes. A matching print, stylized into graceful Arabic curves, carried the message in large, confident letters, and the mood was of buoyant detachment--a graceful declaration of independence.

After this graphic, the audience designed its own background, using elements seen before or those it invented (with guidance). What it finally produced was striking and individual, yet amounted to no more than the graphic of the final beach

scene, with a setting sun added, a dimmer, softer light, a smaller version of the scene's poem. (Text in Presentation 2.0 can be resiled quickly and easily, one of the program's practical strengths.) A seabird--another prepared graphic--appeared in the sky. The audience was quite pleased with its efforts, and everyone requested a paper copy of the finished product, which was later sent by mail.

Presentation guests also were invited to comment on all the versions of the poem, choose and defend favorites, and finally, to suggest changes in type fonts and graphics and comment upon them. The flexible technology allowed changes of the most sweeping kind to be made in an instant, as viewers watched the screen. (If the report is to be prolonged--the audience may at this time design its own background to the poem, directing a presenter in adding ovals, lines, boxes, color shifts--the nuts and bolts of graphic design.) This time was also devoted to question and answer about use of Presentations, difficulty of effects, and considerable technical chit-chat.

Finally, at the height of her creativity, Professor Krebs showed the effectiveness of words by themselves, with no graphics. Against a purple black graduated background--again with light appearing in he upper left hand corner--using a simple but delicate font, she created letters in gradation of pale gray and purple, presenting a haiku of nighttime mourning for a newly-dead wife.

Segment 3

The final presentation of our program dealt with Shakespearean sonnets. Here the musical clips used were first Elizabethan in tone, at a brisk, dancing pace, and the sonnet chosen was the "If I with my unworthiest hand profane--" Romeo and Juliet's sonnet of meeting, pronounced at the masked ball of the Capulets.

Introductory information on the sonnet was presented in the manner of the previous haiku program. A background predominantly green, a color of growth and reassurance, was highlighted with tangerine-colored or black graphic decorative elements in Elizabethan text, decorative motifs, and a portrait of Shakespeare--all graphics contained in Presentations 2.0. With a blending feature which connects two slides, Shakespeare's picture appeared on the title page slowly, in random squares, as a "clip" of Elizabethan dance music began. Needless to say, Professor Krebs was responsible for this pleasant effect.

As part of the explanation of the English sonnet, with its three vivid pictures, I chose the famous quatrain of "That Time of Year," which begins, "In me you see the closing of such day..." The graphic was a peaceful, rather desolate seascape with a single cottage, during a dark sunset, with a few sky colors reflected in tidal pools. Since the slides of this program were more text-intensive, I used varieties of the Humanist font, which has the advantage of being both slim and highly readable, so that a great many words can fit in a single

line.

For the major Romeo and Juliet sonnet, the graphic chosen was a beautifully photographed and colored dance poster advertising the schedule of our UVSC Ballroom dancing team. Peach and light gray-blue colors were set against a deep brown-black background, and highlights of many other colors, deep green, apricot, and tangerine, were also in evidence. The picture offered myriad possibilities, and, by scanning it, I was able to copy segments, edit colors, and establish the clarity of any image. The dancers, their flowing motions and blue-white garments caught in slow-motion photography against a glowering darkness, perfectly illustrated the tone of the lovers' encounter.

As the sonnet progressed through various conceits about the touching of hands and lips, different sections of the poster appeared. All of them were taken from a "clip" of two dancers, a young man in dark colors lifting a girl high in the air as her white swirling skirt flows downward. The words--spoken as dialogue in the play, were divided into pale blue-gray for Romeo's lines, and a peach-tan color for Juliet's responses, both against a very dark brown-black background matching the photograph. Since I could control the rate at which the lines appeared on the screen, I could also isolate both the images, and the thematic and lingual effects quite easily.

The poem's major conceit concerns the hand-play in which Romeo attempts to clasp Juliet's hand, does so, and then kisses

it. Illustrating this device, I used one of the great strengths of "paintbrush" editing of photographs; variations of color can be introduced. I was able to darken the pictures, slightly, progressively. This at once induced a mood of gathering sorrow, and showcased the light-colored lines, where emphasis should, after all, be concentrated. I could erase any stray glints of color which would interfere with text or mood, even a glint of no more than a single pixel.

Various lines used various closeups, to illustrate a talk interpreting the poem in detail.

Finally, to return to larger thematic elements in the play, I stressed the tragic destruction of the lovers, and what it signifies within the context of Shakespeare's full work. I used a musical clip which was sad, soft, and funereal, and employed the "paintbrush" editing feature to shrink the picture to a closeup of the lovers' linked hands, now motionless in death. Then using only this section , I "blew it up" until it was almost as large as the screen. I next "rotated" the picture so that the hands shifted from upright to horizontal, as if one body lay atop the other in death. Only the hands were visible, and I toned out the optimistic blues, leaving a range of deep gold and gold-green, suggesting a banking fire. Finally I stretched it, so that the effect was distanced from the viewer by unnatural elongation in the horizontal. The upper part of the screen remained dark, except for a caption, "Within days these lovers will be suicides." Finally, using a feature of Presentations

called "Overlay", I added a line of text in light gold included on the next slide. Slowly the line from Midsummer Night's Dream appeared in the lower left, where I had edited the picture to eliminate distracting glints of color: "So quick bright things come to confusion."

The final slide was a simple black, and the picture faded into it.

Segment 4

Since the principles we demonstrated were simple and generally self evident, our conclusion was a brief one. We re-re-stressed the broad and flexible range of focus of presentation technology for the CAI poetry classroom--and by implication, any literature classroom. (It is equally, I might add, adaptable for the composition classroom.)

An earmark of any presentation of this type, I find, is that the audience can become so riveted by questions of technological how-to that it is difficult to stress broad concepts at the conclusion--especially if the presenter has "saved the best for last"--or what the presenter sees as best. A kind of mutual technical zest can grip the assembly, distracting all but the coolest logicians. It is a very good idea, then, to stress dominant principles early in the show, and keep analytic exercises, exploration of ideas, and other activities until the end, when the audience seems to prefer more "hands-on", specific learning.

VI. Conclusion

The combination of several technical and creative features, I believe, made this presentation a success. Cynthia Krebs' impressive artistic talent, her knowledge of psychological and visual factors in presentation art, the musical syncopation of varieties of sound clips, the variety of ways which one slide can be superimposed on another, the malleability of art and photography from scanner images--all made this presentation a pleasure to give, and, I believe, a benefit to teachers viewing it.

The benefits of classroom technology, I believe, have often been grasped only very slowly, in large part because those who present the technology do not always know, specifically, the parameters of individual teacher and classroom requirements. Too often, little long-term contact exists between teachers and technologists; the dialogues of mutual facilitation are abbreviated or non-existent. In fact, a barrier to acceptance of campus technology is the failure to appeal directly to the teacher who will use it. Technologists, charged with popularizing products among faculty, may stop at intermediaries in their bids for product acceptance. They approach deans, department heads or other technical specialists--people far too specialized to research and function in individual classrooms frequently--rather than the classroom academics who will actually push the buttons. In my view, the closer the "pushers" of buttons work with the button pushers, the faster technologies

like Presentations will receive the popularity they deserve.

As for Professor Krebs and me, we am "sold" on presentation technology in the classroom. My own distance learning students praise it, and I find it an excellent way to convey basic information, challenging or complex concepts, prompt analytical thinking--even administer tests. It stores information neatly, allows students to make up missed lectures by reviewing slide shows, and ensures that each student and class will receive exact duplicates of lectures on fundamental concepts. I hope that presentations like ours will speed and facilitate acceptance of this classroom technology with its multiple possibilities.